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ABSTRACT

The Master of Arts in Education (M.A.E.) program was created when Truman State University (then Northeast Missouri State University) was designated the state's premier liberal arts and sciences university and most of the undergraduate and graduate programs in education were phased out. The rigorous program is heavily field-based with extensive cooperation and collaboration in public schools involving small town, rural, and urban settings with a variety of populations to ensure a wide range of experiences for students. A major internship is part of the program. To strengthen the M.A.E. interns as scholars, a research component is coupled with the internship resulting in action research or a publishable paper. The program is highly selective in admissions and the placement rate for graduates ranges by major from 80 to 100 percent. (ND)

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Truman State University's Bold Teacher Education Transformation: The M.A.E

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Truman State University's Bold Teacher Education Transformation: The M.A.E.

From 1867 to 1986, Truman State University provided a significant, traditional program for the preparation of teachers evolving from a normal school to a teacher's college to a school of education with B.S.E., M.A. and Ed.S degrees. The traditional history took a bold and dramatic turn, unparalleled in the state, when, in 1985 the legislature designated then Northeast Missouri State University the state's premier liberal arts and sciences university. The regional focus became a statewide focus overnight. Further, the university decided within a few years to change its admission policy to highly selective (the only highly selective public university in Missouri). The name change; however, took until July 1996 to accomplish.

The change to an undergraduate liberal arts statewide service area resulted in unprecedented ramifications for teacher education at Truman. In a relatively short amount of time, most undergraduate and graduate programs in education were phased out as inappropriate for an institution with an undergraduate liberal arts mission. Basic teacher education; however, was viewed as central to the university's history. Discussions grew heated. After much research and debate, the very creative, progressive and controversial M.A.E. was developed. Virtually

all divisions at the university are involved in some aspect of the M.A.E.; leadership was visionary, to say the least.

The program is rigorous. To strengthen M.A.E. interns as scholars, a research component is coupled with the internship and a Saturday class, Applied Educational Psychology, generally resulting in a reflective case study, e.g., action research or a publishable paper. Some choose the option of a publishable paper; very few choose the option of a traditional thesis. The teaching certificate in hand means interns can substitute teach for pay for their mentors, no small motivator for those paying for their fifth or sixth year of higher education. All Special Education interns serve as teachers of record in year long positions; most are offered continued employment at the completion of their internships. Elementary and secondary interns may apply for teacher of record positions, year-long teacher associate positions or semester long (18-20 weeks) positions similar to extended student teaching assignments.

University leadership has supported this expanded internship by providing generous travel allowances so that university professors who supervise are able to travel four or more hours to a school site, stay overnight, and have enough time to observe a half day or more, consult with the mentor teacher, department head (if appropriate) and building administrator. In addition, the interns receive support

and ongoing education in a class (Applied Educational Psychology) which meets six Saturdays during the internship.

Nay-sayers proclaimed that too few people would want to move to a small town in a rural area of northern Missouri as either faculty or students to make the program viable. The highly selective admission status, coupled with a strong tradition of state-supported, affordable higher education; however, has resulted in a very high number of applicants to the university assuring annually a very strong pool of well educated and highly motivated applicants for the M.A.E. Those who feared that M.A.E. first year teachers would find the marketplace difficult due to their more expensive degree have been proven wrong. Rarely do M.A.E. graduates fail to get offered teaching positions, and generally they are hired within their preferred geographic areas.

Some would say a major drawback to the program is its expense. For Truman State University, it has taken the strongest levels of commitment from the highest layers of administration not only at the university, but at the state level, for this program to reach and maintain its current level of success. That teacher education at Truman State University is the major graduate program, producing high quality professional educators, indicates a respect for teaching as a profession, not a "cash cow" program as is so often the case.

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The Division of Education faculty at Truman State University do not operate within a cocoon. Quite the contrary. This basic teacher education program, although a graduate level program, is heavily field-based with extensive cooperation and collaboration in public schools. Early Field Experiences involve small town, rural and urban settings with a variety of populations to ensure a wide range of experiences for students. Internship sites are carefully screened in order to find appropriate mentor teachers, in schools which support the M.A.E. concept and encourage the intern as s/he develops as a teacher/scholar. Action research is essential and complements the M.A.E. program theme of "Becoming a Reflective Pratitioner."

The success of the M.A.E. is due in no small part to the ability of faculty and administrators to be creative with resources. For example, the Division is in a year-of-record for NCATE re-accreditation during the 1996-97 academic year in temporary facilities so that the main education building on the campus can be gutted and renovated. In order to keep its progressive and student-oriented program innovative, technology has been maximized. In order to document all the experiences of M.A.E. students for accredation, technology is being utilized in the form of CD portfolios. In this way, the program remains dynamic, innovative and future-minded to ensure viability during a difficult time.

Perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from the M.A.E. is that support from the highest levels of university leadership is essential. Faculty must be ever vigilant and always willing and able to justify the program to students, colleagues, public school personnel and to university leadership. University leadership, then, has the responsibility of justifying the program to state lesislators. Success sells itself. The responses to surveys of interns' public school mentors and administrators of interns is overwhelmingly positive. The placement rate for graduates ranges by major from 80% -100% within six months of matriculation and compares favorable with Missouri's approximate 50% placement of teachers across the state.